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ABSTRACT

Surveyed were functions of special education counselors in Texas as viewed by special education counselors, directors of special education, school principals, and special education teachers. Questionnaires were sent to 215 educators, with 85% of the subjects from 25 school districts participating in the study. Participating were 52 special education counselors, 24 directors of special education, 61 principals, and 46 special education teachers. Medians and chi squares were used to evaluate the ratings (from 0, as undesirable, to 5, as essential) of 88 questionnaire items. Results showed that a majority of the counselor functions were rated 4, as desirable. Also, 143 differences were reported to have been found in the 679 chi squares. Low ratings were found to have been assigned to sponsoring student organizations, conducting play therapy, planning field trips, keeping attendance records, sponsoring clubs, and counseling teachers. (CB)

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ABSTRACT

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This study surveyed the functions of special education counselors in Texas as perceived by special education counselors, directors of special education, school principals, and special education teachers. The relevant professional literature was very limited. Medians and chi squares evaluated the ratings of the eighty-eight questionnaire items. A majority of the counselor functions were rated 4 (desirable). There were 243 significant differences found in the 679 chi squares. Generally low ratings were given to sponsoring student organizations, conducting play therapy, planning field trips, keeping attendance records, sponsoring clubs, and counseling teachers.

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FUNCTIONS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION COUNSELORS [redacted]

William C. Doyle, Ed.D.

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This study surveyed the functions of special education counselors in Texas as perceived by special education counselors, directors of special education, school principals, and special education teachers. Few studies have been done on the actual role of this relatively new professional.

A review of the literature concerning special education counselor functions revealed a paucity of articles and reports from research studies. Although a number of articles discussed the counselor with specific groups of special education students, such as the physically disabled, relatively few studies and articles considered the overall special education counselor who dealt with all areas of special education.

The Encyclopedia of Educational Research had a few brief comments of limited scope by Gallaher (1969, p. 541) about guidance for the intellectually gifted, but nothing was found concerning the overall special education counselor.

Cormany (1970, pp. 641-642) extensively surveyed the literature dealing with the special education guidance services.

He found only sixteen articles concerned with guidance services specifically for exceptional children.

Wyne and Skjei (1970) deplored the relative neglect of special education by most guidance and counseling workers. They suggested that the school counselor should be of service to all students, and not just to the "normal" ones. From their review of the professional literature, Wyne and Skjei concluded that there was a sad paucity of research about the counseling of exceptional children.

Island (1969) reviewed the research literature related to counseling students with special problems. He made several comments about the scant amount of research concerning the special education counselor.

Contrary to the widespread misconception that any counselor can adequately help exceptional children, the special education counselor seems to have very specialized functions. The special education counselor must have special qualifications and abilities not found in every school counselor. (Johnson, 1967)

In February of 1970, the Texas State Board of Education established the Texas State Plan for Special Education. The Texas State Plan A designated a number of specific functions for the special education counselor. The Texas Education Agency proposed many specific functions for the Texas special education counselor. These functions were organized under eight categories. (Texas Education Agency, 1970, pp..7-11).

METHODS

Subjects

This study included special education counselors, directors of special education, principals in schools serviced by special education counselors, and experienced special education teachers.

Several groups were excluded from this study: part-time special education counselors, regular counselors, superintendents, principals without the services of special education counselors, new (inexperienced) special education teachers, and regular classroom teachers. No private or parochial schools participated in the study. Only public schools within the state of Texas were considered.

Eighty-five percent (183) of the subjects from 25 school districts participated in this study. There were 52 special education counselors, 24 directors of special education, 61 principals, and 46 special education teachers. Questionnaires were sent to 215 educators.

Materials

Each superintendent under Texas Plan A was mailed a cover letter, a return form requesting the names of subjects for this study, and a return envelope.

Special education counselors in school districts not yet under Texas Plan A were sent similar materials.

The questionnaire had eighty-eight functions of a special education counselor to be rated. The functions were organized

under the following topics: (1) planning and development, (2) pupil appraisal, (3) counseling students, (4) educational and occupational planning, (5) consulting and counseling with parents, (6) conferring with school staff members, (7) research and development, and (8) public relations. Many counselor functions were gathered from the literature, summarized, restated, regrouped, combined, or eliminated until the questionnaire was developed into its final form.

A six-point rating scale was developed. It was scored with the following scale:

0--Undesirable--should not be done by the special education counselor

1--Irrelevant--not helpful, not appropriate

2--Feasible--sometimes helpful, sometimes appropriate

3--Relevant--moderately often helpful, moderately often appropriate

4--Desirable--very often helpful, very often appropriate

5--Essential--always helpful, always appropriate, always necessary

A cover letter and a return envelope accompanied the qeustionnaire sent to each subject. Two eight and three-fourths by eleven and one-fourth inch manila, clasp envelopes were utilized with each person. All the materials, including the return manila envelope, were placed in one of the manila envelopes.

Procedures

An explanatory cover letter, a return envelope, and a form requesting the names of subjects for this study were sent to each superintendent under the Texas Special Education Plan A and to the special education counselors in school districts not yet under Texas Plan A. A cover letter, questionnaire, and return manila envelope were sent to each person suggested by the superintendents. Any subjects who delayed responding over three weeks received a follow-up letter, questionnaire, and return envelope.

As the completed questionnaires returned through the mail, they were registered and tallied in chi-square tables. Each questionnaire item had a table of its own. The four groups of subjects were divided into four columns and the six questionnaire ratings into six rows.

Questionnaire items were interpreted statistically with medians and chi squares. Medians were determined by counting the tallies. Chi squares were done at the Texas Tech University Computer Center by Chisq, a Scientific Subroutine Program.

RESULTS

Table 1 compares the median ratings of the four groups concerning special education counselor functions. The statistically significant differences also appear in Table 1.

As Table 1 indicates, there are four groups of raters: C--counselors--special education counselors, D--directors--directors of special education, P--principals--principals

especially involved with the services of special education counselors, and T--teachers--experienced special education teachers.

For the sake of economy of space and writing, only the main findings are included in Table 1. The majority of the ratings were 4. The principal group differences are included in terms of pairs of rating groups and the four rating groups collectively.

Significance for chi squares was set at the .05 level or less. With higher probabilities of chance differences, the differences were rejected as not significant.

A few impressions from the data may be given some cautious speculations. It appears that the special education counselors are somewhat more progressive than the other three groups. The directors of special education seem less cautious than the principals.

Several factors may have influenced the rating patterns. The special education counselor is a relatively new role. A director of special education may not have a professional role as definite and secure as school principals. School principals often feel local pressures quite directly. For many years the special education teachers provided most of the guidance efforts with special education students. Principals and teachers are seemingly seeking more help with exceptional children.

TABLE 1

Ratings of Special Education Counselor Functions

Questionnaire item		Median ratings[a]				Different ratings[c]
No.	Statement	C[b]	D[b]	P[b]	T[b]	
1-3	Planning and development	5	5	4	5	CDPT CP CT DP DT
4-15	Student (pupil) appraisal	4	4	4	4	CDPT CP CT DP PT
5	Coordinating the services of the student appraisal team members.	4	3	4	4	CDPT CD CP DT
7	Helping to develop educational prescriptions.	3	3	4	4	CP
8	Interpreting student appraisal results to parents.	5	5	4	4	CDPT CP CT
13	Administering the overall testing program for special education students.	3	2.5	4	3	DP
15	Interpreting test results and other pertinent information to students, parents, school staff members, and other professionals.	5	4.5	5	4	CDPT CD CP CT
16-26	Student counseling	4	4	4	4	CDPT CP DP DT
18	Helping special education students overcome personal and social problems.	5	5	4	4.5	CDPT CP DP DT

TABLE 1--Continued

Questionnaire item		Median ratings[a]				Different ratings[c]
No.	Statement	C[b]	D[b]	P[b]	T[b]	
20	Serving as a resource person for special education students.	4	5	4	3.5	CDPT CT DP DT
22	Teaching guidance classes for special education students.	3	3.5	3	3	CDPT CP DP
25	Sponsoring student organizations.	1	1.5	1	1	
26	Conducting play media (therapy) activities for students.	4	3	3	3	CDPT CP
27-46	Educational and occupational planning	4	4	4	4	CDPT CP DP PT
35	Planning field trips for special education students.	2	1	2	2	DP
36	Participating in curriculum planning for special education.	3	4	4	3	PT
37	Helping carry out the ARD (Admission, Review, and Dismissal) Committee services for special education students.	5	5	4	4	CDPT CP
40	Transmitting information concerning special education students to employers.	4	3	4	3	PT
42	Keeping school attendance records for special education students.	0	0	.5	0	

TABLE 1--Continued

	Questionnaire item	Median ratings[a]				Different ratings[c]
No.	Statement	C[b]	D[b]	P[b]	T[b]	
43	Sponsoring student clubs and organizations for special education students.	2	1.5	2	1	
45	Sending student information to schools receiving transfers from the counselor's schools.	3	3	3	4	DT
47-60	Consulting and counseling with parents	4	4	4	4	CDPT CD CP CT DP DT
47	Interpreting special education services to the parents.	5	5	4	4	CDPT CP CT DP DT
48	Helping parents develop realistic perceptions about their child.	5	5	4	5	CDPT CP PT DP
52	Giving parents educational, occupational, personal, and social information relevant to their child.	4	5	4	4	DP DT
61-77	Consulting with school staff members	4	4	4	4	CDPT all pairs
62	Providing faculty members with information concerning special education.	5	4	4	4	CP CT
65	Getting materials for special education students to the faculty members.	3	1.5	3	3	CDPT CD DP PT
67	Sharing confidential information with faculty members.	3	4	4	3	CD

TABLE 1--Continued

Questionnaire item		Median ratings[a]				Different ratings[c]
No.	Statement	C[b]	D[b]	P[b]	T[b]	
70	Offering teaching suggestions to teachers of special education students.	4	2	4	3.5	CD DP DT
74	Counseling special education teachers with personal problems of their own.	2	1	2	0	CDPT CD CT PT
75	Conducting group guidance for special education teachers with personal problems.	1	1	1	0	CDPT CT DT PT
76	Taking part in case conferences about special education students.	5	5	4	4	CDPT CP CT DP DT
78-82	Research and evaluation	4	4	4	4	CDPT CP
79	Helping evaluate the schools' total special education guidance program.	5	5	4	4	CP
83-88	Public relations	3	4	4	3	CDPT CD DP DT
1-88	Sum total ratings	4	4	4	4	CDPT all pairs

[a]
0--Undesirable
1--Irrelevant
2--Feasible
3--Relevant
4--Desirable
5--Essential

[b]C--Counselors--Special Education Counselors
D--Directors--Directors of Special Education
P--Principals--Principals especially involved with the services of Special Education Counselors
T--Teachers--Experienced Special Education Teachers

[c]probability levels of less than .05

CONCLUSIONS

The professional literature concerning the overall special education counselor is speculative, fragmentary, or nonexistant. Most articles that consider the counselor dealing with all types of exceptionalities actually only speculate what the functions should seemingly be. Other articles deal with specific guidance techniques and programs. Many of the actual research reports deal with guidance for one or more specialized fields such as the blind or the deaf.

This report has attempted to make a needed contribution to the very limited research literature about the full-time special education counselor who deals with all types of exceptionalities. The participants were persons actually counseling special education students or dealing with exceptional students who receive the services of special education students.

The general special education counselor is a relatively new professional. Special education counseling cannot be done adequately by every regular counselor. It is a specialized professional role with special requirements all of its own.

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